

The Major Problems in Planning Postwar America

AVERY CRAVEN

Dr. Craven, professor of American history at the University of Chicago, poses four problems to be faced in planning for America after the war.

ON WHAT PROBLEMS and issues must the American people make up their minds in order to reach intelligent decisions in planning postwar America?

To answer this question I must assume that the chief things which Americans want are peace and prosperity. They hate war and they love the good things of life. They would like to have both at a minimum of cost or, if possible, at no further cost than the war itself has required. If the average man could state his position, I think it would be something like this: Give us back the good old days when European wars stayed on their own side of the world and when every American worth his salt had his chance to become independently rich.

The trouble here, of course, is that all this is impossible. We cannot return to the past even if such a past as these words suggest ever existed. Modern technology has completely undone us. National independence no more exists for us than for the peoples of Europe. Conflict of interests and ideas is inevitable; permanent peace cannot be had without effort and cost. The fundamental problem is to make Americans understand the facts in the case and to accept their responsibility. The matter of prosperity must be of secondary,

not primary, interest.

The first step in such a "revolution" is an intelligent effort to discover the causes of war—not only the causes of this war but of all wars. We cannot hope to avoid them unless we know what produces them. Yet where is there any agreement on the causes of the American Revolution, the Civil War, the First World War, or the present one? We have a set of glib stereotypes which we recite about leaders forcing peoples into war, rivalry between differing political systems, the clash of economic foes, the denial of access to raw materials, and so on, but we have never been able to get down to the grim realities that have to do with nationalism, fears and lack of security without military strength, and the ways by which interests and prejudices are transformed into moral rights and basic principles. All wars are still defensive wars and each nation still has God on its side. To this very moment we have not made a single advance. We still offer the old stereotypes in the face of the frantic efforts at appeasement made by Chamberlain and Hull and Stalin, the agreements made between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia in the early days of the conflict, and the cruel fact that both Germany and Japan were able to launch

their attacks with war materials abundantly supplied by the very nations they attacked. We positively know that neither Germany nor Japan would have taken the steps which ultimately led to war if they had known beyond a doubt that they would face a united world ready to fight to the finish. Most certainly we must know more about the causes of war in the future than we do today if we are to have enduring peace.

PROBLEMS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

The second step is to make perfectly clear to Americans the fact that they are now a part of the world and its global problems. The cold facts of capital invasions, of raw material dependence, of market necessities, of sensitivity to outside depressions and disturbances, must be realized and the responsibilities involved accepted. We must, furthermore, give up our hostility to England. She is, and will be in most of the difficulties ahead, our friend and ally. We cannot go on disliking England. Nor can we keep on fearing Russia. We have more in common with that great sprawling, aspiring nation than any other on the globe. She will be, as she has been in the past, our warmest friend—or, if we choose, she will be our most dangerous enemy. War or peace for the future lies in our decision. And with these changes must come a new attitude toward Latin America. Condescension does not become one so dependent on neighbors for both raw materials and political security. Old traditions cannot serve a people entering a new era.

In the third place there is the problem

of making democracy work here in America if we want it to be taken seriously elsewhere. We have thought it a system so perfect that all the world would gladly adopt it. They have, in fact, been adopting everything else and looking in scorn on what they consider our failures. And well they might if they studied Chicago or Kansas City or almost any other American city. Until we have gone to the trouble of making democracy work, until we ourselves have gained some clear idea of what it means, we are in a very poor position to judge other systems or to aid others in their efforts to forward democracy.

WORLD CITIZENSHIP

And lastly, we must accustom the American people to think of some kind of international machinery which operates on them in spite of national boundaries. The idea of world citizenship must be born. The right of other men in other lands to present their point of view to us in all cases where our attitudes are of importance to world peace and progress must be accepted. Nationalism and national independence must be redefined for us as well as for the lesser peoples who can only assert their rights and then go down in a hopeless fight to maintain them. Justice and decency are not matters of national size and strength in a world that wants perpetual peace. And the machinery for getting them must be international, not national.

To contribute toward the acceptance of these things is to make possible an intellectual revolution in America and to contribute to the achievement of peace for all mankind.